EXCLUSIVE: PAUL OPENS HIS HEART IN AN ASTON HING

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McCartney and Lennon in 1963

By DAVID WIGG

IT IS five-and-a-half years since John Lennon was gunned down outside his New York home, but the memory of that great loss still makes Paul McCartney cry. "I haven't really come to terms with it," Paul admitted. "You might as well ask me how I coped with my mum's death when I was 14 and she died from cancer at 40. I dealt with it badly.

"I occasionally cry, but the nice thing is I think of them with great warmth and great love, and that's what counts." There are moments, like those when Paul is recalling some stories about John for his children, when memories become too much emotionally. "I choke up," he said. "I care very deeply, but I don't know what to do with my care."

Paul believes that his true feelings about John have been misunderstood, that some people might have imagined it ended with them hating each other and him resenting John. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"He was always a bit of a hero to me, because to start with he was one-and-a-half-years older which makes a big difference when you are 16. He had gone through what I was about to go through.

"At 17½ they've got all the drape jackets, they've got all the gear together and they know how to grow sideburns, which you are just working on.

"We always loved him, but he could be overbearing. He could put you down as soon as look at you, but that is part of what we loved about him. I think John was certainly one of the greatest people I've met."

"He was devastatingly funny. He had this acid wit, which was well known, but you didn't want to get on the wrong side of him. That was none too pleasant.

"But he was more than a hero to me. It was when I'd see great acts of kindness and they would always be done very quietly. Not many people knew about those things. Occasionally he'd give someone a car. Yes, he was very generous with it."

After the break-up of the Beatles and the stormy disentangling of the Apple company business, Paul doesn't disguise the fact that there had been a strain of his friendship with John because of bitter rows over business.

There were times when Paul could be forgiven for not trying to save their friendship, having once turned up at John's Manhattan apartment and been refused entry just because he hadn't called to say he was arriving.

"I wasn't angry—I was sad. I thought: 'Jesus, things have come a long way'."

But as John once turned away the entire Rolling Stones, who had arrived unexpectedly, Paul didn't feel as humiliated as he might.

"Just before the end we had made up. The actual blessing of it all was that on a few counts things had come right. That was why it was so devastating he was killed like that.

"Before, he'd suspected me of doing a dirty business deal and I'd wonder if he was doing one. So we'd had our share of troubles that way.

"In the end, on the last 'phone call, I made this rule that we mustn't talk about business, which has now become a rule among the Beatles."

THAT last conversation Paul had with John on the 'phone brought them together again. "I had a wonderful warm conversation with him. He was padding around his apartment feeding the cats. That was very John. He was a great cat lover, like my son. I'm not—I'm a dog person.

"He was bringing up Sean, which gave him a great deal of pleasure, because he had so little time to bring up Julian from his first marriage, which he'd really missed."

If John were alive today, Paul would like to think that they would be writing together again.

"I know we loved each other. I know all the bitterness, all the nasty Apple business was brought on by business craziness. He always used to look over his glasses and kind of say: 'It's only me.'

"There was always that behind his facade. It was like he'd always reach out occasionally and show that he liked you. All three of us still think of him very much as we always did.

"Luckily, all that business thing is fading now and I've quite recently seen George and Ringo and we all got on like a house on fire. Ringo, I know, still thinks of us as the brothers he never had.

"So if John were still here we'd either be writing together or John would have gone a bit more avant garde, which was the direction he enjoyed.

"I think one way or another he would have still been doing very strong stuff. I think his art was only ready to blossom."

Some people found it surprising that on the day of Lennon's death, Paul went ahead with a recording session in London. And today even he finds it hard to believe.

"George Martin rang me up and asked me whether I wanted to cancel the session, and I said: 'No way—I can't sit at home with this one.' I just had to go through the motions and try and do something to take my mind off what had happened. Yoko did something that day as well." He remembers it as a very scary day.

"But not only for me. Of course, for the ones that were close to John it was very distressing. But John was very well loved by most people, it affected everyone.

"I still don't know what happened to the guy who did it. I hear he's locked up, but for how long? He wants his autographed copy of the record back. It's bizarre."

Although John did hurt

John Lennon—gunned d

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